

A Pragmatics-Based Study on the News Discourse of the “Youth Image” in *China Daily*

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Abstract

The vitality of a nation is deeply intertwined with the vigor of its youth, making youth affairs a strategic priority. Since China entered a new era, its youth have engaged with the world with unprecedented breadth and depth. They actively participate in international affairs, demonstrating a level of rationality, tolerance, confidence, and self-reliance seldom seen before. This article adopts an interdisciplinary approach, integrating pragmatics with news discourse. Employing a literature review and a mixed-methods design that combines quantitative and qualitative analysis, it examines how language is employed in *China Daily* to construct and project the image of Chinese youth. The study finds that the newspaper’s discourse strategically adheres to collaborative and appropriateness principles to foster a positive and influential youth image. In the process of adhering to pragmatic principles, news reports have successfully shaped multiple positive images of contemporary Chinese youth: they are not only deeply engaged in social affairs and shoulder the responsibility of promoting national development, but also play the role of cooperators in international exchanges.

Keywords: Youth Image; News discourse; Pragmatic Principles; *China Daily*.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Youth are universally recognized as the hope of a nation’s future and a vital force in global development. Chinese youth have been actively involved in the historic goal of national rejuvenation since a new age of growth began in 2012. Therefore, a concentrated analysis of how China’s youth—important players in this revolutionary process—are portrayed in international communication channels is necessary to build a vibrant and strong global image of modern China.

Media plays a pivotal role in shaping public perceptions of social groups. Existing research on Chinese youth imagery has largely focused on Western media’s “othering” narratives, which often portray Chinese youth through a lens of difference or problematization [1]. In contrast, a growing body of scholarship examines “self-construction”—how Chinese media actively build and project youth images. For instance, a discourse-historical analysis of *China Daily* (2013–2020) reveals that the newspaper presents a multifaceted youth image, depicting them as individuals with multiple social identities, responsibilities, and a blend of strengths and weaknesses [17]. Furthermore, studies on media representation consistently show that news discourse is a powerful site for identity

construction, often governed by underlying power dynamics and persuasive strategies.

Despite these insights, a significant research gap remains. While discourse analysis and critical discourse studies have been applied, there is a scarcity of research that specifically employs a pragmatics-based framework to dissect the news discourse used to build the “youth image” in China’s premier English-language online outlet, *China Daily*. Pragmatics, which examines how language is used in context to achieve communicative goals, is particularly suited for analyzing how news discourse functions persuasively, constructs identities, and aligns with broader socio-political narratives. This study aims to address this gap by systematically investigating the pragmatic strategies employed in *China Daily*’s coverage of Chinese youth.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Previous Studies on Youth Image in News Reports

The portrayal of youth in media has attracted significant scholarly attention. Early research can be traced back to cultural studies, where theorists such as Stuart Hall examined youth subcultures in terms of cultural resistance and incorporation [2]. John Fiske, in *Understanding Popular Culture*, analyzed youth

subcultures like cowboy culture and fan culture [3]. Henry Jenkins further advanced this discourse by proposing concepts like “textual poachers” and “convergence culture,” illustrating how youth engage with media texts to construct cultural identities and affiliations [2].

In China, the “youth image” formally entered historical and media discourse with publications like *New Youth* and the May Fourth Movement. Subsequent studies have often employed framing theory and methods such as content analysis to investigate the media construction of youth images. For instance, Li compared the framing of youth images in *China Youth Daily* and WeChat public accounts, exploring the reasons behind their divergent approaches [4]. Chen, through an analysis of the evolving portrayal of “Lei Feng” in the *People’s Daily*, argued that the image shifted from personal worship to collective contribution, from a heroic figure to an ordinary citizen, and from a moral metaphor to a symbol of economic development, reflecting how national development needs shape news representations [5].

International comparative studies further highlight cross-national differences. Wang notes that media portrayals in China, the United States, and the United Kingdom share historical commonalities while exhibiting distinct characteristics: Chinese youth are depicted positively, moving from vague generalizations to specific details; American portrayals have transitioned from violent anger to expressions of discontent; and negative depictions of British youth have gradually diminished [6]. These variations underscore the imprint of each country’s socioeconomic context on media representations. Consequently, scholars suggest that Chinese media should strengthen international communication to cultivate a positive, innovative, and proactive image of contemporary Chinese youth [1].

The rise of new media platforms such as WeChat, Weibo, and TikTok has shifted focus to how youth construct self-images through digital means. For example, Chen argues that self-photography on social media enables a stylized presentation of the self, which can interact with, and at times diverge from, traditional media discourses [7].

However, existing research predominantly focuses on descriptive analysis, framing, or self-presentation, with limited systematic examination of how news discourse constructs youth images from a pragmatics perspective. Pragmatics suggests that communication follows certain principles to ensure that expressions align with recognized communicative intentions and achieve desired effects. News discourse, as a specialized form of discourse, involves journalists selecting linguistic strategies to convey information, while audiences receive and interpret these messages,

forming an indirect communicative process. Therefore, analyzing how news discourse effectively shapes and communicates positive youth images based on pragmatic principles holds significant theoretical and practical value. This study will employ *China Daily’s* 2023 reports on youth as a corpus, integrating pragmatic principles to systematically investigate the strategies and functions of its news discourse in constructing youth images.

2.2 Previous Studies on Pragmatics Principle

Pragmatics, as a discipline concerned with language understanding and use in context, provides a crucial theoretical foundation for analyzing media discourse. Its central focus lies in examining how meaning is constructed not merely by linguistic forms, but by the dynamic interaction between speakers, listeners, and the context of communication [8].

The theoretical core of pragmatics is built upon several foundational principles that govern effective communication. Among these, the most influential are the Cooperative Principle and the Politeness Principle. The Cooperative Principle, proposed by Grice, posits that participants in a conversation typically adhere to four maxims—Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner—to ensure efficient information exchange. When these maxims are ostensibly flouted, meaning is generated at a deeper level, a phenomenon known as conversational implicature. Complementing this, Leech’s Politeness Principle explains why speakers often choose indirect expressions. By adhering to maxims of Tact, Generosity, Approbation, Modesty, Agreement, and Sympathy, communicators aim to maintain social harmony and manage “face” in interactions. Together, these principles form an integrated framework: while the Cooperative Principle facilitates the literal transmission of information, the Politeness Principle regulates social relationships, often motivating deviations from strictly cooperative talk.

Scholarly interest in these pragmatic ideas started in China in the early 1980s, progressing from preliminary introductions to in-depth theoretical investigation. By introducing domestic readers to the nature and essential issues of pragmatics, scholars like Hu and Cheng established the foundation. Later, He made significant contributions to the area by developing a strong framework for pragmatic analysis in the Chinese setting [9]. These studies have demonstrated that, especially in persuasive or ideologically charged language, manipulating pragmatic principles—whether by following them or purposefully breaking them—is a popular tactic for accomplishing particular communication goals.

Building upon this theoretical heritage, this paper focuses on how these pragmatic principles operate in journalistic language. It aims to analyze how reports

on the theme of youth image in *China Daily* strategically employ or manipulate principles such as the Cooperative Principle, Politeness Principle, and Face Theory to construct particular youth identities and achieve desired expressive effects.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Questions

1. How does *China Daily*'s use of collaborative principles manifest in its news discourse within the thematic coverage of "Chinese youth"?
2. How does *China Daily*'s use of appropriateness principles manifest in its news discourse within the thematic coverage of "Chinese youth"?

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

The selection of 2023 as the focal point for this study is grounded in its distinct socio-historical significance. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, during which Chinese youth were prominently framed as a responsible and resilient collective, the year 2023 emerged as a pivotal phase for consolidating this narrative within national discourse. Official media outlets, including *China Daily*, strategically intensified their coverage of youth themes during this post-pandemic period. Empirically, 2023 witnessed a notable surge in youth-centric reporting within *China Daily*, characterized by dedicated editorial initiatives aimed at engaging both domestic and international audiences. This provides a rich, coherent corpus for analysis. Academically, this focus addresses a temporal gap in existing research, which has largely examined pre-2020 media representations, offering a timely opportunity to investigate contemporary linguistic strategies.

This study constructs its own corpus by extracting articles related to youth from *China Daily* using the search terms "Chinese youth" and "Young Chinese" from the year 2023. The initial search yielded 939 articles, totaling 572,837 tokens. Employing stratified random sampling, 48 articles were selected—from the 10th and 20th of odd-numbered months, and the 1st and 15th of even-numbered months—to serve as the primary linguistic data for qualitative pragmatic analysis. Quantitative data on the frequency and proportion of specific words and sentence structures were analyzed using online corpus tools and manual counting to provide a foundational understanding of the linguistic landscape. Based on this quantitative overview, this study integrates the selected language materials with theoretical frameworks from pragmatics, news language, and language communication studies to explore the pragmatic strategies employed in *China Daily*'s news discourse on "Chinese youth."

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Collaborative Principles in *China Daily*'s Thematic Coverage of "Chinese Youth"

The cooperative principle, proposed by H.P. Grice in 1967, posits that in effective communication, there is an implicit understanding between participants to cooperate towards a mutually accepted goal [8]. This principle is manifested in four maxims: quantity, quality, relation, and manner. In the thematic coverage of "Chinese youth," the cooperative principle governs how news discourse facilitates effective communication between the media and its audience.

4.1.1 The Maxims of Quality: Truthfulness and Objectivity

Truthfulness is paramount in news reporting, requiring that information be factual and accurately reflect reality [12]. This maxim necessitates a thorough and genuine comprehension of Chinese youth's surroundings, lives, and thoughts. The media can only properly communicate their opinions and build a credible picture by accurately depicting their realities. News outlets must cover news events objectively, refraining from openly expressing their own prejudices or viewpoints [12]. This is essential for preserving the credibility of the media and letting the public make their own decisions.

China Daily adheres to this maxim by grounding its reports in verifiable facts and direct engagement with its subjects. The use of specific data and official surveys is a common strategy to fulfill the quality maxim, lending an air of authority and factual precision to the narrative.

e.g., Around 65.4 percent of Chinese people are fans of *hanfu*, the traditional clothing of China's Han ethnic group..." (Example from *China Daily*)

e.g., 357 youth volunteers from Sichuan Agricultural University provided 15,710 hours of service in Dujiangyan, organizing over 200 disability assistance events and 126 children's workshops. Their efforts directly helped 83 disabled individuals achieve a monthly income increase of 200-500 yuan. (Example from *China Daily*)

This first statement, anchored by a specific percentage, presents the information as an objective fact, thereby building trust with the audience and truthfully reflecting the image of young Chinese inheritors of excellent traditional culture. In the second news sentence, specific numerical reports depict the image of young people who are responsible and conscientious in engaging in social affairs, embodying the persona of globally-minded youth.

4.1.2 The Maxims of Quantity and Relation

(a) The Maxim of Quantity

The maxim of quantity concerns the amount of information provided, requiring that it be as informative

as is required for the current purpose of the exchange, but not more informative than is required [13]. In news, this translates to the principle of moderation, where the information volume must be sufficient to convey the facts clearly without being redundant. As a global news platform, *China Daily* applies this principle by tailoring the depth and breadth of its “youth image” coverage to audience interest and the significance of the topic.

e.g., The village, which occupies 4.42 square kilometers, has 400 permanent residents, 80 percent of whom are 60 or older. (Example from *China Daily*)

This report tells the stories of three post-95s youths dedicated to rural revitalization. The specific figures in the example provide necessary and precise information about the village's scale, demographic structure, and industrial benefits. This highlights the image of responsible young people actively engaging in the rural revitalization cause.

(b) The Maxim of Relation

The maxim of relation dictates that contributions should be relevant to the immediate context and the overall topic of communication [13]. In news, this principle operates on both macro and micro levels.

On a macro level, the selection of news events for the “youth image” theme must be relevant to the broader social context and the core theme of portraying youth vitality, innovation, and responsibility. The coverage must align with the newspaper's overarching goal of projecting a positive national image. On a micro level, all elements of a news report—from the headline to the lead and the main body—must be highly relevant to each other and to the central news event. The headline must accurately summarize the core of the story, and all background information and supporting details must serve to illuminate the main subject, ensuring coherence and informational integrity.

e.g., Progress report on China's youth development (Example from *China Daily*)

This report, based on the statistical monitoring of the *Medium- and Long-Term Youth Development Plan*, reflects the core requirement of the Maxim of Relation in its structural arrangement — that all information serves the central theme of “youth development”.

4.1.3 The Maxim of Manner: Conciseness and Accuracy

The maxim of manner concerns how something is said, requiring perspicuity—specifically, to be brief, orderly, and avoid obscurity and ambiguity [14]. In news discourse, this is embodied in the principles of conciseness and accuracy.

(a) The Maxim of Conciseness

Brevity is essential in today's digital world, where people have short attention spans and limited time. News discussions should be straightforward and efficient, providing important details quickly. In the “youth image” reports from *China Daily*, conciseness is reached by using straightforward headlines and succinct sentence forms. Headlines serve as the main connection to readers and hold great significance. The publication frequently utilizes single-topic headlines, applying methods such as shortening words or leaving out grammatical elements to enhance effectiveness and conserve space.

(b) The Maxim of Accuracy

Accuracy is indispensable for maintaining the value and credibility of information^[14]. Precision in word choice is critical for portraying the multifaceted nature of Chinese youth. *China Daily* upholds this maxim by using specific data, precise verbs, and carefully chosen vocabulary to describe youth's characteristics and achievements, avoiding vague or overly absolute language.

e.g., More than 55 percent of Chinese young people believe that hard work and diligence can improve their prospects, according to a study of posts and comments by nearly 5,500 active young internet users aged 14 to 35. (Example from *China Daily*)

In the above examples, the data is explicit and the sample information is clear, adhering to the principle of accuracy. This report highlights that, as the future hope of the nation, Chinese youth possess confidence in both their own prospects and the future development of their country, projecting an image of a vibrant and confident new force.

4.2 Principles of Appropriate Language in *China Daily's* Theme Reporting on “Youth Image”

While the cooperative principle focuses on the efficient and truthful sharing of information, the principle of appropriateness stresses the adaptability of language to the broader communicative context, including social, cultural, and interpersonal elements [15]. It guarantees that the message is not only comprehended but also well-received. In “youth image” reporting, appropriateness is crucial for achieving the intended perlocutionary effect—fostering a positive emotional connection with the audience and reinforcing a favorable view of youth.

4.2.1 Principles of Respect and Affinity

These two principles are key manifestations of the broader politeness principle within the Chinese cultural context, which places a high value on harmonious social relations.

(a) The Principle of Respect

This principle requires communicators to show deference to both the audience and the news subjects. For the audience, respect is demonstrated through user-centered design and clear, accessible reporting. *China Daily's* structured reporting format respects the audience's time and need for efficient information access. Placing important "youth image" stories prominently on its website further signals the value it places on this topic and its readership.

E.g., Jood Sharaf, a student from Bulgaria studying at Tsinghua University... chose the word 'shocking'— not to describe China, but to refer to the way in which it is shockingly different from the impression that she and her friends back home used to have of the country. (Example from *China Daily*)

The report presents the voices of young people from eight countries on an equal footing, with each individual given the opportunity to express their own views and experiences, respecting the authentic feelings of these young individuals. This example demonstrates that Chinese youth have already made their presence on the international stage, showing an image of cooperative communicators.

(b) The Principle of Affinity

This principle aims to bridge the psychological distance between the communicator and the audience, fostering a sense of connection and empathy. *China Daily* achieves affinity in its "youth image" coverage through two main strategies: the selection of relatable topics and the use of an approachable language style.

Geographically and psychologically, the news events are often chosen for their proximity to the audience's daily life, covering relatable aspects of study, work, and personal growth. Linguistically, the newspaper employs a more straightforward and occasionally colloquial narrative style, moving away from purely formal, bureaucratic language. The use of inclusive pronouns like "we" can further enhance this sense of shared experience and collective identity.

e.g., With the development of the times, more and more young people are demonstrating a positive spirit. They dare to dream and courageously take on responsibilities, interpreting the image of today's youth with their actions. Whether in urban streets or rural fields, we can see their busy figures. They irrigate this land with the sweat of their youth, and write their own chapters with wisdom and courage." (Example from *China Daily*)

This excerpt employs vivid imagery and a slightly elevated, yet accessible, prose style. The phrases "dare to dream" and "courageously take on responsibilities" are emotionally resonant, while the inclusive "we" subtly invites the audience to observe and admire these youth alongside the reporter, thereby

creating a shared emotional response and a sense of collective pride.

5. CONCLUSION

This study has analyzed the news discourse used in *China Daily's* 2023 coverage of Chinese youth through the lens of pragmatics. The findings reveal that the newspaper's discourse is systematically structured around two overarching pragmatic frameworks: the cooperative principle and the appropriateness principle.

The cooperative principle, manifested through the maxims of quality, quantity, relation, and manner, ensures that the information conveyed is credible, clear, and efficiently delivered. These strategies build a foundation of trust with the audience, presenting the youth image as a factual and reliable construct.

The appropriateness principle, especially reflected in the culturally-grounded principles of respect and affinity, operates on an interpersonal level. It ensures that the message is not only understood but also emotionally impactful and socially harmonious. By showing respect for youth through positive terms and fostering connection through relatable topics and an appealing way of speaking, *China Daily* nurtures a positive emotional connection between its audience and the youth it portrays.

In conclusion, *China Daily's* construction of the "youth image" is a sophisticated pragmatic endeavor. By strategically adhering to both cooperative and appropriateness principles, the newspaper successfully projects a multifaceted and positive image of Chinese youth—as innovative, responsible, and dynamically engaged with their society and the world. This dual commitment to informative clarity and interpersonal resonance is key to the effectiveness of its international communication. Future research could expand this analysis by comparing the pragmatic strategies of *China Daily* with those of other international media outlets, or by examining how these strategies evolve over a longer time span.

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